



Focus Group Discussions Report

on the

“Dreaming Nigeria”

**Vignettes and Public Service Announcements
Anti-corruption Television Series**

Lagos, Nigeria

June 12, 2003

BACKGROUND

On Thursday, June 12, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Lagos to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the “Dreaming Nigeria” television series. The series - consisting of 13 sets of vignettes (lasting from four to eight minutes each) and related 30-second and 60-second public service announcements (PSAs) - was designed to educate the Nigerian television viewing public about the deleterious effects of corruption for the country’s development and its negative impact on their lives. The PSAs, in effect shorter versions of the vignettes, are intended to reinforce the messages more fully elaborated in the latter. Although focusing on corruption, the various programs bring to light the myriad ways in which corruption permeates different service delivery sectors and undermines the country’s political, economic, and social institutions. Among the topics chosen for illustration in the series were police corruption; fraudulent elections; judicial corruption; nepotism; corruption and ethnic conflict; corruption and problems of development; higher education, sexual harassment, and the brain drain; altered medications; and corruption and the lack of schools and playgrounds.

VENUE AND FGD PARTICIPANTS

The FGDs were conducted at the headquarters of Channels Television, one of Nigeria’s most highly regarded private TV networks, and producer and sponsor (together with the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA and the Independent Corruption and Related Offences Commission, [ICPC]) of the series in the metropolitan Lagos region. Channels TV recruited participants and made available Ms. Avoola Agbenla to act as facilitator. The FGDs were conducted via a guide (attached) developed by Casals and Associates staff; the FGDs were observed by Casals staff and video recorded in their entirety (copies of the videos are available upon request).

Each group consisted of seven participants. In the first group (begun at noon) there were five males and two females representing different age groups (ranging from college age students to a man in his late 50s) and with educational attainment levels ranging from secondary to college, the primary Channels TV target audience. The second FGD, begun at 2:35 p.m., consisted of four women, two middle-aged and two young ladies, as well as three college-aged men between the ages of 20 and 30.

RESULTS

During the conduct of both FGDs, the facilitator readily established rapport with and drew all participants into the discussions, while managing the sessions very effectively. As a result, participants were deeply immersed in the discussions, group dynamics often leading to spontaneous and elaborate exchanges. Following a get acquainted introduction and a brief overview of the FGDs’ purposes, the facilitator began the sessions by exploring the participants’ media habits’ preferences and, in particular, their preferred venues for receiving news and information. The facilitator was also asked to assess participants’ general views regarding the state of Nigerian TV as a means to probe how they perceive, from a technical standpoint, the quality of the PSAs and vignettes, as well as their communication and cultural adequacy.

Viewing habits

Both groups reported a strong preference for television as the medium of choice for both entertainment and news. Several participants indicated relying on television as their principal source of news, some naming the 10 p.m. Channels late evening news as well as NTA's 9 p.m. news as among their favorite programs. A participant went as far as saying that "apart from Channels and NTA news, there are no other channels worth watching for news in Nigeria." For the FGDs' participants, radio was the least favored medium, with most only listening to the radio when other alternatives are not available (while riding in a car, for example). Also, radio performs poorly in terms of news credibility, the groups indicating, after television, a preference for newspapers and magazines when seeking information. Student participants expressed a desire for more educational programming in Nigeria.

Participants are in general very dissatisfied with the quality of Nigerian TV. One middle-aged participant complained about "lots of unprofessional programs," others being unhappy with production quality and disregard for viewers' satisfaction, as when, for example, programs are inexplicably cut-off during transmission without explanation. Others referred to the difficulties of following a story line when different segments of a serial are shown out of sequence. These problems are attributed to lack of financial resources and the failure to hire professionals. Several participants expressed a preference for watching TV programs produced abroad, one stating that "Nigerian TV is still a backwater." Nevertheless, several participants noted that the quality of Nigerian TV has improved since the advent of independent TV stations (there are currently eight independent stations in Lagos alone) broke NTA's broadcast monopoly.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

The general discussion of media habits was followed by the sequential presentation of four of the 60-second PSAs (those dealing with fraudulent elections, police corruption, higher education, sexual harassment, and the brain drain; and corruption and ethnic conflict). The reaction of both groups was generally positive to the PSAs. Participants were pleased with the production quality, one participant observing that the background flute music "is fantastic; it sets the mood," while also praising the script and voice of the actor portraying the storyteller. This same participant, with a background in broadcasting, noted that the make-up of the storyteller, in particular the make up for his long beard, could have been done better. Participants in the second FGD broadly concurred with these reactions, but there was some debate as to the realism of a storyteller in today's urban Nigeria and the fact that most shoppers go to the markets during the day rather than at night. These concerns, however, were not universally shared, some attributing the setting to poetic license.

Preferences for one or the other PSAs varied from participant to participant and from group to group. One young female participant who had seen the fraudulent elections PSA as the general election campaign was under way was particularly pleased with the content of the PSAs and recalled having thought, when she had viewed the PSA, that it was significant someone had finally decided to publicly address "vital things happening in our country." In general, younger participants tended to identify better with the one

dealing with higher education (this particular PSA combines several aspects of the problems confronting college students, while focusing on sexual harassment) since it faithfully portrays the problems they will be facing upon graduation (e.g., lack of jobs). Others identified with the police corruption PSAs, one participant stating that it conveyed very well the reality of daily life in Nigeria while pondering if the bribery scene was real or if it had been performed by actors. Participants as a group felt that the PSAs illustrate the reality of Nigeria as it is today, the oldest participant in the first group noting that corruption is the “vane of development in Nigeria...can’t leave anything out...everything in there has to be examined and rectified.”

A participant complained that the PSAs are not more direct. Instead of focusing on the behavior of private citizens, the PSAs should direct attention to the government and the role of corrupt public officials. One participant noted that it would have been better had they been “more caustic towards the government, more direct, and aggressive.” Still another FGD participant noted that while the PSAs are effective in conveying their messages, they focus too much on problems and not on solutions.

The most informed member of the first focus group, a journalist by training, also noted that the ethnic conflict PSA fails to note that ethnic diversity should be a source of strength, and that rather than calling attention to ethnic division, the PSA should place emphasis on “moral degradation.” This same participant also called attention to the fact that in Nigeria (in reference to the police corruption PSA) many people forget to praise the police for the good things they do, and in comparison to other things going on in the country, the significance of the bribes they demand is “infinitesimal” in magnitude.

The consensus view of both groups, however, is that the PSAs are effective in conveying their intended message. When probed to determine if they achieved their goal, one of the participants, a youth, replied with “Corruption must go, you will be the victim of your own corruption,” the closing line in each of the PSAs. His remarks were followed by the general approving laughter of the group. Yet another participant observed that the underlying PSA message is that Nigerians must change their attitudes if they wish to deal with corruption and become less selfish; if they did so, Nigeria could become a better country.

Vignettes

Four vignettes were selected, and shown to the groups and discussed one at a time. The narrative below reviews the substance of the comments they generated.

Fraudulent Voting Practices Vignette

This vignette, with a running time of 4 minutes 30 seconds, was universally liked by the participants. From a technical standpoint it was judged to be well done, with good music, acting, and effects. The perceived message was exactly what was intended with participants recognizing that what is needed is for Nigerians to assume their responsibilities as voters and citizens more seriously. A young woman, for example, noted that the key is to “start with every individual, do things on our own, and initiate a chain reaction,” while an older male participant, in echoing her thoughts, commented that

“We all have our responsibilities to the nation; let’s be upright.” The vignette was also regarded as effective in that it brought to light the disregard with which elected representatives assumed their functions, as when a young male participant mentioned that politicians “don’t represent us very well or respect our vote.” A male participant in the second FGD also indicated that an underlying message of the PSA is that democracy must evolve, and that Nigeria still has a lot to learn.

In general, the participants’ reaction to this vignette was very positive as evidenced not only by their vocalizations but also by their body language. They opine that the vignette forcefully and realistically depicts a serious issue and that it did so at a critical time, just days before voters were to go to the polls to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly.

Police Corruption Vignette

This vignette generated a lot of discussion in both focus groups since the participants were, by and large, able to identify with a problem they face almost on a daily basis. As noted earlier, the participants were impressed by the realism of the vignette and even wondered how the camera crew had been able to capture on video such an act (it was actually staged by actors on a Lagos side street while making sure no police were in sight). While recognizing the universality of police bribery, some participants were also aware of some of the institutional and economic setting circumstances that encourage this type of corrupt behavior. One participant noted that many police officers are illiterate or nearly so and that their economic prospects are dismal more often than not.

From the participants’ perspectives, whether to agree or not to a police request for a bribe is colored by how and under what circumstances the request is made; a female respondents went as far as to say that she usually refuses if the officer making the request is unarmed, but acquiesces if he is. Yet another respondent noted that even police officers are vulnerable, as they often run into serious problems when confronting much better armed robbers preying on travelers on the country’s highways. The underlying themes that emerged from the two FGDs is that the topic of police corruption is a complex one - while citizens might be able to take some actions on their own, they are not likely to go far unless the conditions encouraging this behavior are not changed. At the same time and in relation to other themes in the series, police officers must be educated as to the negative consequences of their illicit acts, in keeping with the notion of personal responsibility. A secondary and important message, recognized by some of the participants, is that not all police officers need be corrupt and that many current and prospective members of the force could help change the force’s pervasive corruption culture. At the same time, some participants commented that the vignette did not offer options citizens could use to fend off requests for bribes.

Higher Education, Sexual Harassment and the Brain Drain Vignette

Of all the vignettes, this was the one that generated the most intense and animated discussion, perhaps because it touches on several different interlocking issues within a university setting, such as poor employment prospects for graduates and sexual harassment. These features of the vignette, and the fact that it deals with widespread

practices in Nigerian campuses perceived by many participants as immoral but sustained by connivance between professors and school administrators, provoked a great deal of giggling, laughter and even sorrow among some of the participants, suggesting that the vignette reflects participants' personal or secondary experiences. In fact, a middle-aged woman participant in the second FGD related during the session that she had experienced a victimization attempt and how she reacted to the impropriety she was being subjected to. A particularly strong emotional response followed the statement by the actress playing the harassed female student when, after being handed a dreaming Nigeria key by the storyteller and been advised to denounce the professor, she replied with a mournful face, "a key to bring more problems unto myself!"

A male student participant chimed in with his own story about a lady friend being harassed, claiming she was under great stress since there was not much she could do, other than drop out of school. Other participants suggested that even that option would be costly since in order to gain admission to another Nigerian university, the student would have had to obtain an endorsement from her former alma mater. Those students who give in, however, often fall prey to other lecturers who assume they are easy pickings. Still another participant called attention to a famous case in Nigeria where an attractive and academically accomplished medical student who turned down the sexual advances of a lecturer was failed three times in her exams. Despite these experiences, she fought back and completed her medical education with her dignity intact.

Several morals were drawn from this vignette. One was that it is easy to ask people to stand up for what is right, but that it is far more difficult to take a stance when an individual has to do it alone while paying a high price. The vignette also reflects, in the view of an older participant, a general state of moral decadence when professors, who should serve as role models, instead prey on helpless students – "People must stand up; change must come from the lecturers, not only from the lady."

Ethnic Conflict and Corruption

This vignette - only shown to the first FGD, as time was running short during the second, received passing marks, although it did not generate the same amount of interests as the others. In vignette format, this presentation answered an earlier criticism of the related PSA (shown earlier) when it was claimed that ethnic diversity ought to be regarded as a source of strength rather than division, one of the vignette's underlying themes. The vignette portrays how Nigeria's ethnic diversity is manipulated by dishonest politicians to distract attention from their corrupt actions. One participant provided his own interpretation of the vignette's message by suggesting that the phrase "ethnic division" should be substituted by "moral degradation."

CONCLUSIONS

The impression from the analysis of the FGDs is that the “Dreaming Nigeria” PSAs and vignettes effectively convey the messages intended. As it may be recalled, it was decided early on – in consultation with the Mission and the Embassy - that given the potential political volatility of the corruption issue, it was advisable to approach the topic gingerly and with a forward-looking approach suggestive of a better future if corruption were dealt with. Two secondary underlying concepts were also implicit in the series design. The first was to educate Nigerians about the many ways, often unrecognized, in which corruption impacts development and their own daily life. The second was to ask citizens to become active participants in and supporters of anti-corruption initiatives. By the reaction of the FGD participants, the “Dreaming Nigeria” series achieves its objectives.

It is also significant that the vignette approach is effective in engaging the public attention since it exceeds local production capabilities both in terms of quality and entertainment value, given its mini-drama format. While in terms of overall production quality the series fails to match Western standards (e.g., some vignettes last much longer than others, some problems with sound mixing and make-up, etc.) as a series exclusively produced in country with local talent (although with expatriate technical support) it compares favorably with the nationally produced programming while appealing to local viewing and cultural tastes (e.g., over dramatizations).

The FGDs participants also validated the approach of the anti-corruption campaign. The two main concerns regarding the presentations were, first, that the short PSAs did not fully elaborate the dimensions of the issues being presented. The second was that while they were successful in identifying problems, the vignettes and PSAs felt short of offering solutions to the viewers, other than calling for personal responsibility and active involvement in the fight against corruption.

The first concern diminished significantly once the participants were exposed to the longer vignettes that presented the issues within a broader and more elaborate perspective. This concern was anticipated when the series was designed as it gives emphasis to the coordinated weekly broadcast of vignettes and PSAs. The principle behind this approach is that repeated exposures to interlocking messages are likely to leave a more lasting impact.

As far as the second concern goes, the series was designed to skirt specific anti-corruption prescriptions for fear of destabilizing impacts (given the power of the mass media) and antagonizing powerful political forces and economic interests that could derail the efforts of anti-corruption advocates. The danger for this to happen in Nigeria’s political environment, particularly before the 2003 elections, was quite real. Earlier this year, powerful politicians at Abuja’s National Assembly, threatened the very survival of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

In addition, the original concept of presenting role models with prescriptive examples was discarded at the request of the ICPC. They felt that the potential choice of the wrong personalities could undermine the effort. The rationale for this recommendation was illustrated by the example of a police officer included in an earlier demo who, after having been praised by the national media for his upright behavior, just a few weeks later was found to be implicated in some equally publicized questionable activities.

Finally, it is satisfactory that the principal audience targeted by the PSAs and vignettes - the better educated and higher income TV viewers - judged as the more credible Nigerian news outlets Channels Television and the NTA evening news broadcasts. The fact that the PSAs are transmitted through Channels and just before or during the NTA evening news broadcasts ensures that the campaign messages are reaching the country's most influential audiences.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the FGDs are clear. If the mass media is to be used as an effective tool to mobilize the population in the struggle against corruption, the "Dreaming Nigeria" series constitutes but a first salvo (together with the ICPC's own outreach efforts through the mass media) in a long-term effort that must be sustained and made increasingly more aggressive in years to come. As suggested by the FGDs, Nigerians seem to be eager for direction, and while pleased with the content of educational promos, are likely to be avid consumers of more prescriptive programming capable of suggesting specific actions to arrest corrupt practices, as well as of programming capable of challenging corrupt individuals and institutions. Comparable campaigns with rising crescendo approaches have been used in other national contexts in which educational campaigns, similar to "Dreaming Nigeria," have metamorphosed into surgical public policy change instruments by helping mobilize civic support for reform agendas and challenge public misdeeds. Achieving this would require supporting the development of a local rapid response capability to develop programming that could be aired in a matter of days. The guiding premise behind such a long-term effort is similar to that used under the social marketing rubric where in country after country the family planning concept was introduced and gradually reinforced by increasingly more candid and forceful appeals.

Facilitator's Guide
Focus Group Discussions

“Dreaming Nigeria”

**Television Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
and Vignettes**

A. Opening

1. Welcome to the group
2. Introduction of facilitator and others present in the room
3. Explain purpose and context of focus groups; nature of the campaign but without going into much detail; findings will help improve message delivery
4. Role of the group: anonymity; confidentiality; express opinions candidly; no correct or incorrect answers

B. Media Habits

1. How often do you listen to the radio? Watch television? When and where do you watch TV?
2. What TV channels do you watch most often? And what type of programs do you prefer?
3. From what source do you get news (newspapers, radio, TV, family, friends, other)?
4. Which of these sources of news do you trust the most? Which one do you trust the least?
5. Are you generally satisfied with Nigerian TV? Are you satisfied with Channels TV?
6. Would you change their programming in anyway?

C. Now I am going to show some public service announcements. After we are finished, I would like to discuss them with the group.

1. How do you feel about them?
2. Why?
3. Which one did you like best? Why?
4. Which one did you like the least? Why?
5. Which one, in your opinion, has the most to offer to Nigerians?
6. What is the message they are seeking to convey?
7. Given their goal, do they achieve it?

D. Now I am going to show some short vignettes. After we are finished, I would also like to discuss them with the group.

1. Which of the vignettes do you feel; appeal the most to Nigerians?
2. Which one, in your opinion, has the most to offer to Nigerians?
3. What is the message they are seeking to convey?
4. Given their goal, do they achieve it?
5. Which vignette did you personally prefer? Why?
6. Which one you like the least? Why?
7. Which ones did you like best, the shorter ones we saw earlier or the longer ones we just watched? Why?

E. Do you have comments you may want to share with the group regarding the corruption/gratification problem in Nigeria?

Finally, do you have some suggestions for improving the campaign (other themes, times of the day when they should be broadcast)?

F. On behalf of Channels TV, thanks for your participation (if refreshments are to be provided this is the time to announce it and give participants their token of appreciation).